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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

It is our profound pleasure to present *The Counsellor* 15(1) August 1997. A total of 16 conceptual and empirical papers, clinical reports, sound theoretical and analytical position papers have been packaged in this volume. The articles addressed varied gender issues in counselling. All the papers represent very authoritative, incisive and educative product of profound research and robust intellect. The utility of the articles cut across the needs and interests of our various categories of audience - counsellors, teachers, school administrators, corporate organizations and researchers. It is our hope that all readers will find this volume very rewarding.

We wish to use this medium to thank all the counsellors who participated in the two successful conference held since the present executive came to power. We are grateful for the opportunity given to us to serve you.

Dr. C.C. Ekeonnia
Editor

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**PHYSICAL AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL EFFECTS OF
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
IN NIGERIA**

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Introduction

In Nigeria, there is hardly any day that our newspapers, magazines and the television stations do not carry reports about violent acts in our society. One day, it might be report of "area boy" molesting innocent citizens on the streets of Lagos; the next day, it might be report of "Rambosyle" dare-devilanned robbery in which as many as twenty or more people may lose their lives. The day after, it might be the report of a cold blooded assassination of a prominent citizen (member Pa Alfred Rewane, Allagbaji Sutan Adedeji, Rear Admiral Onuochinwa, Professor Pellet the Magician, Allagbaji Kudinat Abiola? Have we all forgotten the parcel bomb episode of late Dede Giwa? How about the frequent reports of ritual killings and secret cult violence in our higher institutions? Do we recall the case of a husband who poured concentrated acid on his wife to "check her infidelity? How about the priestess who burnt the fingers of two young siblings so as to exorcise them? We are too sure that we can go on and on and we will still find more strange and bizarre cases to reveal. It seems to us that this country is under siege and that we all appear to be helpless.

What seems to have happened to our age old values and customs? What has happened to our African spirit of being "our brothers (sister's) keepers"? If these cases are more or less externalised into the society, what then is the situation in our individual families? Sadly enough, the situation in the family is, in fact, more worrisome. The family is perhaps the most violent social group in our community today and the home the most violent social setting. A person is more likely to be hit or killed in his or her home by another family member than anywhere else (Gelles & Straus, 1979). Nearly one out of every four murder victims in the United States is a family member. Similarly, in Africa, Great Britain and Denmark, the greatest proportion of murders are intra-familial (Nwokoye, 1995). In fact, beatings, slappings, stabbings, burnings and chokings are common occurrences in many families. These violent acts occur usually between husbands and wives, between children/siblings or in the chronic abuse of children by parents. Until quite recently, only with the concerted efforts of women's groups such as NCWS, WIN, FIDA, FOMWAN, YWCA etc., much family violence in Nigeria has remained hidden because it was considered a private affair. Even now, social welfare workers, counsellors and the police seldom get the cooperation they need to prosecute wife batterers. Thus, it is fairly difficult to get accurate statistics as to its occurrence in Nigeria. Family violence now range in severity from the spanking of a troublesome child (which, though usually is socially acceptable, is still a form of violence) to assault, rape and even murder.

Violence is a very common term and we all think that we know what we are talking about when we use it. But violence is much more complex than it appears at first glance. Violence may be defined as "behaviour intended to cause bodily pain or injury to another person or group of persons". People who use violence in this way only worry about acts which they see or hear about and do not like. They may be thinking of the four major violent crimes of murder, assault, rape and robbery. There are, however, other forms of behaviour which cause harm to people and may not be manifested physically. Although a consideration of these acts may seem to fall out of the focus of this paper, it is quite important to briefly discuss them so as to later on harvest their effects on women especially.

current research in the area of violence is beginning to focus not only on the use of the word, but it has now been extended to embrace all acts which are intended to be detrimental to the health and social well-being of one or more other people. As such, the term "abuse" is being gradually introduced into the literature. The reasons are three-fold:

- i. Violence is more or less limited to physical acts whereas abuse may involve non-physical acts;
- ii. Violence is a word that is generally not tolerated by both the victims and the perpetrators whereas abuse looks milder, it still captures the whole essence of the act; and
- iii. abuse is a term that is used in describing other social problems such as child abuse, drug abuse etc.

From what we have said so far, violence involves harm and desecration and so does abuse omission resulting in harm to another individual. For this purpose, therefore, the generic concept of abuse can thus be used to describe acts of physical abuse (or violence as it is ordinarily known) and emotional abuse. A brief explanation of these two terms is necessary to guide our subsequent discussion of the physical, social and psychological effects of violence against women:

1. **Physical Abuse (or Violence)** - This is indicated by physical injuries generally considered to be deliberately inflicted by a person e.g. a male spouse or parent on another person e.g. a female spouse or girl-child. It is undoubtedly the easier form of abuse to identify because the injuries are often visible even to untrained or casual observers.
2. **Emotional Abuse** - This represents injury to a person's psychological self just as physical abuse of injury to the person's body. Its intent and effect are somewhat primitive and it is of verbal criticism, harassment or denigration. It can also be manifested as criticism of say a woman's failure to meet unrealistic expectations or standards set by a man. It may also be seen as emotional deprivation, that is, a failure to provide the psychological climate needed for say a woman's well being. It represents a lack of emotional involvement in what someone else is doing especially between husband and wife, father and daughter etc.

We can go on and on to describe these occurrences but it is appropriate at this juncture to direct our attention to violence (or abuse) against women.

Violence Against Women

The Holy books (The Bible and The Quran) are replete with verses which seek to protect the dominance of the man over the women but at the same time rever the sanctity of the woman. It is quite clear to us that these Holy books preach that women should be loved, comforted, protected and fairly treated. You will please spare us the ordeal of citing the relevant verses as we are sure that most of us can point to at least one or more of such passages in this Holy book. The point we are trying to make here is that women constitute the weaker sex (don't ask us about the Iron ladies!) when compared with men and any act which seeks to harm, injure, traumatise or cause pain to them is at least not morally or spiritually acceptable. In fact, we believe that it is not also right in logic.

The reasons why men abuse women, or why women are abused, are legion. It is not within the framework of this paper to discuss these although we know that the socio-cultural pressures of today's Nigeria has not made matters easy. A point of fact that is incontestable is that women have been abused, they are being abused, and if prompt precautionary/preventive measures are not taken, they will continue to be abused. We have thus decided to limit our focus to six major forms of violence that are directed against women, especially Nigerian women. They are:

1. Emotional Abuse
2. Wife Battering
3. Sexual Abuse (leading to rape)
4. Armed Robbery/Assassinations/Murders
5. Circumcision
6. Widowed "blues"

Emotional Abuse

This exists when a man, because of his social status, physical strength or some other socio-cultural factors, cannot physically aggress a woman. This is common among men in middle or high class families who are highly literate and live in urban low-density or high-density residential areas. Emotional abuse can be in overt or covert ways, that is, some of its mechanisms may or may not be observable. These can be manifested in the form of name calling, verbal attacks or criticisms or use of derogatory language. Other forms it can be more subtle and therefore more difficult to discern, such as the different "sput-down" mechanisms used against women regarding their emotions, feelings, views, perceptions or even their intelligence.

Most women are unable to report this form of abuse but are able to live with it for a long period until they reach a breaking point. Such breaking points are displayed in the form of physical attacks, admission into hospitals for depression, stress, drug abuse or separation/divorce.

Wife Battering: This exists when the wife is in fear of the husband's superior strength and combative ability and has no means of matching or beating him or effectively defending herself or stopping him (Davidson, 1978). Wife Battering is a very common form of violence against women in Nigeria. Lots of lower class families who live in high-density areas of our urban centres do not perhaps know of any other way of resolving a marital conflict. It is no news to neighbours and relatives for a husband to beat, push, shove, slap, kick or knock down a wife. In some severe cases, women are struck with objects, they are choked, stabbed or even shot. A quick run through any of our Weekend Newspapers, Evening Newspapers or soft-sell Magazines would reveal more than enough details of wife battering. It is quite unfortunate that the latest addition to the act is being manifested in husband "spraying" their wives with concentrated acid so as to desecrate them. We are sure we all recall the story of a husband and wife on Frank Olyze's Sunday programmes, *Newsline*. Many more unfortunate incidents have been shown on the programme. Child abuse is the correct label that we would use to describe the unfortunate incident of a priestess who burnt the fingers of a young lady and her brother to "cast the devil out of them". Thank God today that she is languishing in prison.

A most disturbing trend about wife battering in Nigeria is that it's beginning to cut across all socio-economic levels and is becoming prevalent at all occupational levels (Fosudo, 1991; Nwokoye, 1995). The truth of the matter is that middle and upper-class women conceal their situations and, as such, reports of such cases are usually not documented. Wife battering is now taken as a normal event in most parts of our society.

Sexual Abuse (Rape) This is another common form of violence against women in Nigeria. A lot of sexual abuses are perpetrated by adult males on young unsuspecting girls. Police records and social welfare agencies show details of girls asked to perform various sexual acts for a favour or a fee. How about sexual harassment? Is it not a common phenomenon? The next most talked about issue today in our higher institutions, other than secret cults, is sexual harassment. The problem is so worrisome that the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) on February 20th, 1989 put pressures on Professor Jibril Aminu, the then Minister of Education to set up a nine-member committee to study the problem and make recommendations toward its solution. The committee submitted a report but has the problem been solved? No.

Rape is a serious criminal offence in which sexual intercourse is forced upon a woman against her will with use or threat of force. A lot of rape cases abound in our society but only very few get reported. Most women get scared of the social stigma that is placed on them as rape victims. We are aware of a lot of rape cases that are known or detected in our various institutions of learning (secondary schools, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities) but the authorities are unwilling to follow through legally. At best, such offences are classified as physical assault for which rustication is the worst punishment. Some victims of house breaking or armed robbery do also experience rape, in whatever way this is exhibited. It is quite clear that rape victims, who are women, do suffer physical as well as severe social/psychological consequences.

- (l) Hair pulled out
- (m) Burns (from cigarette, oils or acid)
- (n) Bleeding (internal, external)
- (o) Forced Abortions/miscarriages
- (p) Hypertension
- (q) Infections/Diseases (e.g. AIDS)

Any attempt to give examples of each of these may be self-serving. We can all discern these signs on individuals and it is left for us to empathically interact with them as victims of violence.

(ii) **Social Consequences:**

As a result of some of these physical effects, women who are victims of violence find it difficult to socialise, to accept social responsibility and to carry out socialised functions. As a way of avoiding the socialised setting, they become isolated, withdrawn and feel insecure. They learn to sometimes make up for these deficiencies by taking to some deviant behaviours, too, such as prostitution and alcoholism. Again, the social effects of violence on women can be manifested in any of the following:

- (a) Loss of job/employment
- (b) Economic hardship (stealing if possible)
- (c) Forced independence
- (d) Isolation/insecurity
- (e) Family disintegration (Divorce/separation)
- (f) Social failure
- (g) Mental failure
- (p) Hospitalisation
- (u) Prostitution
- (j) Drug Abuse
- (k) Alcoholism
- (l) Destitution (lack of grooming)
- (m) Premature death

As women who have been wives and were always dependent on their husbands for the care of the family, violence breeds fear and such fear leads to insecurity and low self-esteem. A stress on a woman who has been trained in social skills, it is often most difficult for violated women to cope with their daily activities. Children also suffer social denigration, delinquency and neglect as a result of violence inflicted on their mothers.

(iii) **Psychological Effects**

So far, we have highlighted that the effects of violence can be seen or observed on women (physically) or they can affect them in their relationship with the community or in their daily social functioning. There are other effects of violence which are not readily observable but which impairs the psychological homeostasis and functioning of the victims. These are termed the psychological effects. These include:

- (a) Emotional Disturbance
- (b) Poor judgement
- (c) Fantasizing
- (d) Guilt
- (e) Denial of Anger
- (f) Tremors
- (g) Feeling of loss/blankness
- (h) Stress Reactions
- (i) Anxiety
- (j) Depression
- (k) Premature death

Armed Robbery/Assassination/Murders: Although these are not particularly directed against women, they (women) also fall victims of these violent acts because of their significant positions in the family. Except in peculiar circumstances in which women have been targeted for assassination (as in Mrs Bisola Tejuosho, Alhaja Sufiat Adejiji and Kudirat Abiola's cases) or murder, women are as likely to be victims of armed robbery, assassinations and murders as men. We must not fail to touch on the increasing grave of ritual killings in which women's private parts are severed and their bodies dumped in bushes, streams or highways.

Circumcision: Though a traditional practice, female circumcision is still carried out in some places in Nigeria. Whereas the common practice is to circumcise a girl at birth or early in childhood, some customs do so in adolescence or in adulthood. Circumcision is painful, it is injurious and in the rural areas, it is known to be done with unsterilised razors or knives. We all can guess that this practice may lead to infections, diseases and subsequent death. We are all familiar with the practices in our various areas of the country and it is left for us to intervene appropriately.

Widowhood "Blues": A woman who loses her husband has sufficient pain and burden to bear, but in some parts of our country, additional agonies are tied to such widowhood. Some widows are known to have been beaten or incised with sharp objects (to confess their roles in the death of their husbands). Some are asked to drink the dirty water that has been used to bathe the dead husband and others have been physically forced to have sexual relations with brothers of their late husbands. Other obscene, and yet violent, acts that have been meted on widows in Nigeria are better imagined than told. This is the reason why we have termed this problem widowhood "blues".

In the foregoing section, we have tried to make a case for why women should not be targets of violence. Then, we have listed and briefly discussed six main forms of violence that Nigerian women seem to suffer. It is important at this point to discuss the effects of these violent acts against women. Put simply, the question is: what are the effects of violence against women?

Effect of Violence Against Women

Violence is a terrible act and the effects of this terrible act are obviously grave and can be most devastating to women if adequate and prompt remedial measures are not taken. For this purpose, therefore, we shall discuss these effects under the following three broad classifications.

- (i) Physical effects of violence against women.
- (ii) Social consequences of violence against women; and
- (iii) Psychological effects of violence against women.

The discussion of each of these classifications will be done in an outline form since they are inter-related and can be easily understood by us.

(i) Physical Effects

The most obvious signs of violence on a victim are physical. They are either signs, scars or symbols that are readily visible to any keen observer. Except in cases where the victim make themselves inaccessible or tend to conceal parts of the body or its functioning, physical effects of violence on women are usually manifested in the form of:

- (a) Bruise marks on the body
- (b) Contusions
- (c) Scratches/scars.
- (d) Bite marks
- (e) Sprains on the limbs and contusions
- (f) Swellings/bumps on the head.
- (h) Red eye (damaged or destroyed eye)
- (i) broken limbs (Arm, leg)
- (j) Teeth knocked out
- (k) Lacerated lip

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As we have just seen, women who have been battered or violated suffer untold hardship and severe consequences. We have outlined these physical, social and psychological effects. As a result of the violence and the attendant consequences, battered or violated women seem to manifest a profile. It is an understanding of this profile that can assist us in seeking rehabilitative interventions. The profile goes thus:

1. The women generally have a low self-esteem.
2. They seem to have a belief in all the myths of a violent relationship (e.g., "I must have done something to deserve this", "My husband terribly needs me", "The situation will change", "It is a man's right to beat his wife").
3. They seem to have a belief in the traditional value regarding the family, the home and the role of the woman (e.g., "The woman is inferior to the man and, as such, she should be willing to accept anything").
4. They tend to accept responsibility for the abusive action (e.g., a victim of rape may say to herself that it must have been the make-up or the dress that she wore that attracted the rapist).
5. There is usually a feeling of guilt and denial of anger or terror amongst them.
6. They become passive in behaviour, are easily dominated and become unable to manipulate their environment to protect themselves.
7. They have a feeling of loss, unimportance and disenchantment in the home and in the community (e.g., "of course, if I knew I would have married someone else").
8. They are unable to satisfy their own wishes even in relationships that affect them (e.g., "they seem to no longer know what they want").
9. They experience severe stress reactions which are often accompanied with psychosomatic complaints (there are often complaints of headaches or running stomach with no attenuating causes).
10. There is the belief that they are the only ones who can resolve the issue.

Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence

In the past, abused women have usually been catered for in two major ways:

1. **Legal (Correctional) methods:** This falls within the province of the courts and the goal is usually to remove the woman from the home or environment of abuse to protect her. The courts may then go ahead to punish the abusers and, if possible, legislate treatment for them. The experiences of Nigerian women who have gone through this system, as it is documented in police and court records, show that it is too restrictive in its potential for the recovery of the victim.
2. **Social Work Method:** This necessitates the intervention of social welfare workers and it involves their organisation of social service activities for the victims by liaising with the home, the courts, the police, hospital settings and other protective service agencies available in the community. Social workers are charged with the responsibility of co-ordinating activities and developing a supportive relationship with the victims as well as providing them with an insight into the problems. This method has been in practice for several years under the various Ministries of Social Welfare. Cases are handled in the same way in which children that are abused, children beyond parental control and children that are abandoned, are handled. In the case of children, however, there are institutions such as the Motherless Babies Homes, the SOS Villages, the Remand Homes, the Approved schools and the Borstal Institutions to cater for their various rehabilitation needs.

There are no such rehabilitative institutions or facilities for adult victims, especially women victims of violence, in Nigeria. This is the reason why such a rehabilitation centre is urgently needed. Such a centre should be integrative, comprehensive and should be community-based. We are aware of Drug Rehabilitation Centres that have been set up by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in collaboration with United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the Association of Lady Pharmacists (ALPS).

It is being suggested here that such model Women Rehabilitation centres (WRC) should be set up by Government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or private philanthropic agencies with the active support and collaboration of the various women's groups. Local Communities can also mount their own mini-models using available facilities, human as well as material resources.

The Women Rehabilitation Centre (WRC) should be multi-disciplinary in outlook and should consist of at least the following personnel:

- (i) Medical: Doctors, Nurses, Pharmacists to diagnose and administer treatment to victims
- (ii) Social Work: Social workers, Vocational Rehabilitation specialists etc to relate victims with the home, job setting, courts and even the abusers.
- (iii) Therapy: Psychologists, counsellors to assist victims in individual and group counselling; assertiveness training, family life management techniques, anger control and social skills training.
- (iv) Psychological Assessment: Psychologists to evaluate and assess victim's psychological state through the use of tests and other clinical methods.
- (v) Recreation: Officers that will take charge of all leisure - time activities of the victims at the centre. Volunteers within the environment can also participate to make the centres fully community-based, religious bodies, professional groups as well as social clubs can be encouraged to visit the centres to provide needed support.

In communities where it is difficult to set up mini-model rehabilitation centres for victims of violence, certain services could be provided. These include:

- (a) extended family programmes in which the victim's family is attached to another respected and experienced family in the community for protection and support.
- (b) crisis centres in which help-givers (Counsellors, Social Workers Volunteers etc) are available in designated places to give immediate emotional and psychological support to victims, and
- (c) concerned women in the community can form groups such as Violence Against Women Anonymous (VAWA), which also becomes a support group for victims of violence.

Furthermore, a greater sense of awareness among the citizenry is needed to forestall the deleterious effects of violence against women. It is our belief that in situations where men have greater confidence in themselves than make them "super-human beings" and that there are better ways of gaining control over women, then the rate of violence in our society will drop. There is no doubt that when a greater number of womenfolk attain better educational status, the incidence of violence will reduce. The reason is not far-fetched. When many women are educated, they would learn to avoid and reject battering and may learn to join forces together to bring public attention and legal action against it. When a man knows that he could be put behind bars for violating his wife that a tired battered wife can sue for divorce and get a substantial part of his assets as alimony, then he would learn to control his reflexes and behave appropriately.

Conclusion

In this paper, the authors have attempted to highlight the growing incidence of violence in Nigeria. This has reached an alarming rate that it calls for an urgent attention. Next, the paper focused specifically on violence against women and went on to list six forms in which they are manifested in Nigeria. The physical, social and psychological effects of violence against women were outlined for discussion before a model for women rehabilitation centres was suggested. It is the believe of the authors that centres of this nature which are integrative, comprehensive and community-based will offer full treatment for the myriads of Nigerian women who suffer the effects of violence.

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